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A grave disservice to nation

Editor William F. Buckley did himself and the profession of journalism a grave disservice as he thrust himself into the limelight generated by the publication of the "Pentagon Papers."

Mr. Buckley published material in his magazine, National Review, which he initially said was copied from confidential documents from the Pentagon and Central Intelligence Agency Files. Like the Pentagon papers, the material "quoted" leading statesmen of the 1960s in purported agreement or disagreement over contingency plans for the war in Vietnam.

Had the papers been genuine, Mr. Buckley, like the New York Times and others publishing the original Pentagon papers, would be guilty of trafficking in stolen government documents; of endangering national security, and of debased journalistic ethics.

However, now Mr. Buckley says that the whole matter was a hoax: that the papers he published were fictitious. He says his purpose was to show that the "Pentagon and the CIA are not composed of incompetents," that forged documents can be accepted by the public if they sound plausible, and that the war in Vietnam is of global scope.

Mr. Buckley hardly proved his case with false papers. He did, however, cheapen the profession of journalism. He further strained the confidence of citizens in government by making some of their reputable statesmen appear incompetent.

The fact is there is no way that Mr. Buckley or anyone else can make the theft and publication of governments secrets a joke. It is a dead serious matter, and one which still needs to be redressed in the form of punishment of the transgressors.